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Protracted conflicts in the GUAM area and their implications for international peace, security and development

Security Council
Seventy-first year

Identical letters dated 28 March 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Georgia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit herewith the statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, dated 24 March 2016, regarding the thirty-fifth round of the Geneva international discussions (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex issued as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 35, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Kaha **Imnadze**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the identical letters dated 28 March 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Georgia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia regarding the thirty-fifth round of the Geneva international discussions

Tbilisi, 24 March 2016

The thirty-fifth round of the Geneva international discussions was held on 23 March 2016. The participants in the discussions took part, in their individual capacity, in the two working groups, the first focusing on security and stability in the Russian-occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia, and the other on issues related to the safe and dignified return of internally displaced persons and refugees to the places of their origin. The discussions were co-chaired by representatives of the European Union, the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and attended by participants from Georgia, the Russian Federation and the United States of America. The Head of the Provisional Administration of the former South Ossetian Autonomous District and the Chairman of the Government of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, as well as representatives of the Russian occupation regimes in Sokhumi and Tskhinvali, took part in the discussions.

The talks were conducted in a dynamic atmosphere. The participants held substantial discussions on all agenda items within both working groups.

Following the lengthy consultations and concentrated efforts, a principled agreement was reached on the restoration of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism in Gali, which was very positively assessed by the co-chairs and participants. After a break of four years, the resumption of the Gali Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism is a serious step forward in terms of providing stability on the ground, which will significantly contribute to the protection of the fundamental rights of the local population as well.

The co-chairs and participants positively appraised the exchange of detainees as an important step towards confidence-building between the war-torn communities. The co-chairs and participants also welcomed the restoration of the tripartite coordination mechanism, where the issues of missing persons are discussed through the mediation of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Within the first working group, the participants from Georgia addressed the security situation in the Russian-occupied territories. Particular emphasis was placed on the ongoing militarization process and increasing number of military exercises in the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia. Special attention was also paid to the implications of "integration" of Georgia's occupied regions into Russia's military, economic and social space, through the implementation of the so-called "treaties".

The Georgian delegation stressed the necessity of a non-use of force commitment by Russia and the creation of international security arrangements on the ground, in order to ensure the implementation of the 12 August 2008 Ceasefire Agreement. This would contribute to achieving transparency on the ground, as well

as to the confidence- and security-building measures. The expert-level working group continued to work on a draft statement on non-use of force.

The participants from Georgia also focused on the developments near the village of Jariasheni in early March. It was emphasized that such incidents further aggravate the already difficult situation of the local population by restricting their freedom of movement and right to property. The Georgian delegation drew special attention to the new discriminatory regulations that have been introduced in the occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia, which put the rights and freedoms of the remaining Georgian population at serious risk and pose a direct challenge to the stability and security on the ground.

Within the second working group, all issues on the agenda were discussed, including the freedom of movement, the right to education in the native language, the need to protect human rights inside the occupied territories, the return of the internally displaced persons and refugees, humanitarian visits and cooperation in the spheres of cultural heritage and environment protection.

The Georgian participants discussed the grave humanitarian implications of the installation of artificial barriers and the so-called "border" signs along the occupation line. The Georgian delegation also addressed the critically important issue, for the local population, of accessing their farmland without any impediment and underlined the need to respect the local population's rights, inter alia, their property rights. In this context, the Georgian delegation deplored the unacceptable methods of discrimination against the local Georgian population on ethnic grounds under the new regulations adopted by the occupation regimes.

The Georgian delegation also focused on the restrictions on education in the native language in the occupied territories, in particular in the Gali district, and demanded that the right to education in the Georgian language be guaranteed. The Georgian participants further expressed their concern that despite the fact that this issue has been at the centre of international attention during the numerous rounds of the Geneva talks, the situation remains the same.

The Georgian participants and representatives of the international organizations once again underscored the need for international monitoring on the ground.

Discussions on the issue of the return of internally displaced persons and refugees were also held. The Georgian delegation, along with the international organizations, requested that substantial, result-oriented negotiations on this important issue be held.

The participants underlined the need to work together with a view to protecting common cultural heritage. The topics of discussion also included the issue of supplying the local population with natural gas. The Georgian side reaffirmed its readiness to supply natural gas to the Akhalgori population. This offer had been repeatedly made by the Georgian side before but, unfortunately, was rejected by some participants.

The thirty-sixth round of the Geneva international discussions will be held on 14 and 15 June 2016.